

To the House Education Committee Members
Regarding: House Bill 4410
July 15, 2009

Those representatives who are introducing this bill have already given compassionate and enlightened reasons for the need for its passage. As I contemplated what I could share with you today that would help you understand the importance of passing H.B. 4410, my thoughts for being here have names; students who may not have been considered in the development of the MMC. I teach special need, Learning Disabled Categorical, students at Canton High School. Prior to this new curriculum, most of these students earned a diploma by choosing an alternative-vocational graduation plan. Now, most of my students will not earn a diploma. To deny a student a realistic opportunity for a diploma creates havoc within the individual and within our society.

I would like you to get to know a little about the young people I work with, such as Jacob who graduated last year. As a 9th grader, neither he nor his mother was confident that Jacob would graduate. School had always been a struggle, what with all that reading and writing and homework. Jacob much preferred fixing his pick-up than writing essays. At each I.E.P. (Individualized Education Plan), I knew to bring a box of tissue for Jacob's mom. It didn't matter if we discussed failing classes and misbehavior or passing classes and positive teacher comments, these meetings were emotional because Jacob's future was so uncertain. Jacob did graduate on time however; taking some modified classes and finding a vocational interest were vital to his plan for the future and his sense of self. Having completed hands on training in welding at William D. Ford Technical School, Jacob often puts in 50-hour weeks with 2 jobs, changing oil filters and welding. This young man has a future; he is pleased with himself. If Jacob had had to complete the 4-year math sequence and not been able to take vocational classes, he probably would have dropped out. Would Jacob eventually have found his way? Maybe. In the mean time, this restless, angry, unemployed individual would be a strain on society.

Another name that I want to share with you is Nigel. He also graduated 1 year ago and is employed. Nigel spent 2 years hiding behind his long dark hair. But not anymore. He is confident and hopeful. His years at the high school provided him with successes-passing modified classes, taking carpentry courses, participating in football, and being in a supportive environment where Nigel felt safe to make friends. Nigel now has completed 2 years of carpentry courses, is working at Kroger's, and has applied to EMU for Construction Management. This young man has a direction. Without the possibility of earning a diploma and following a path that compliments his learning style, Nigel would not be continuing his education or have the confidence to look for a job. Nigel found hope at the high school because he had options.

The students that I teach do find jobs; these jobs may not be elite careers in medicine or engineering, but I value the stockers and cashiers at my local grocery store, the child care workers, mechanics, hair stylists, truckers, etc. Please see the value of all our students by recognizing their unique talents and different learning styles and passing this bill. All our students deserve to feel hope as they look for their path in life.

Elizabeth Ryda
Special Education Teacher
Canton High School
Canton, MI 48170